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SUBJECT: Demarche on Distracting Driving - Jordan Has Legislative Base, But Enforcement Remains Uneven

REF: A. STATE 6703

[1B.](#) 08 AMMAN 3139

(U) SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION

[¶11.](#) (SBU) Summary: ESTHOFF delivered ref A demarche on distracted driving to officials at the Greater Amman Municipality and representatives of the traffic safety NGO Hikmat on February 3. Both work with a coalition of GOJ partners including the traffic police, Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of Education on improving road traffic safety. Jordan adopted in 2008 a Road Safety Law which includes specific fines for driver distractions, among them cell phone usage. Although no data is available, the law is sometimes enforced by the police who issue fines of 15 JD (\$21) per infringement. Jordan has also certified 2,200 civilians as "friends of the police" to issue tickets when they see a traffic infringement such as cell phone usage while driving. There were steady gains in improving road traffic safety in 2009, with fatality rates dropping by almost 11% from 2008. However, a new government has yet to make traffic safety a priority issue and without high-level attention, it will be a challenge to sustain the last two years' momentum on improving road traffic safety. End Summary.

Challenges to Sustaining Road Traffic Safety Gains

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[¶12.](#) (SBU) Several high-profile traffic fatalities in 2007 and 2008 focused considerable attention on road traffic safety from the King and the then Prime Minister whose intervention resulted in a significant decrease in the number of fatalities and serious injuries over the last two years (ref B). The final 2009 statistics are still being compiled by the GOJ, but early estimates indicate an 11% reduction in fatalities compared to 2008. Essam Shahzadah from the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM), who coordinates road safety initiatives with Jordanian government institutions, the Hikmat NGO, and other partners, noted, however, that it will be difficult to sustain the GOJ focus on this issue. The previous Prime Minister convened almost monthly meetings of the traffic safety task force, but the new government, formed in late 2009, has yet to focus in depth on road traffic safety.

Enforcement of Fines for Cell Phone Usage

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[¶13.](#) (U) The September 2008 Traffic Law No. 49 includes Article No. 38 which provides for a fine of 15 JD (\$21) for "the use of the phone while the vehicle is in motion if the phone, or part of it, is carried by hand." This provision of the law has been enforced and an LES at Post attests to having received such a fine in 2009. No statistics are available yet for the number of fines that have been issued under this provision. The GOJ is also using a novel approach to increase the enforcement of this law. Roughly 2,200 civilians have been certified by the Jordanian police as "friends of the police" and have the authority to issue tickets for traffic infringements, including the use of cell phones while driving. GAM's Shahzadah has this certification and attested to having issued

five tickets over the last two years for cell phone usage. A vehicle does not have to be stopped for these fines to be issued and the friends of the police can record the vehicle plate number and submit the citation to the police. As a result, some citizens are often surprised when they go to renew their vehicle registration and find outstanding fines. GAM has now introduced a web-site through which citizens can check any traffic-related fines issued for a vehicle.

#### Outreach Campaign Indicates Cell Phone Challenge

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**¶4.** (U) A 2009 two-week outreach campaign, "Ana Multazem" (I am committed), inspected over 1,500 vehicles for cell phone usage, seat belt use, and music volumes. If all of these were found to be in accordance with the guidelines, the vehicle would be issued an Ana Multazem sticker to be displayed on the windshield. A "mock ticket" was issued for any infringements. According to Hikmat, only 20% of the vehicles got the sticker, and at least 70% of the infringements were for cell phone usage.

**¶5.** (U) GAM continues to engage in additional outreach activities with the GOJ, NGOs, and the private sector and is focused on campaigns in school zones where a high number of accidents tend to occur as well as partnering with private sector organizations to sponsor pedestrian bridge construction at busy school intersections. A teacher training program with the Ministry of Education is to launch shortly. A road traffic center of excellence has been established between GAM, Hikmat and the German/Jordanian University; and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs offers several courses on improving road safety to government and civil society audiences. Shahzadah will also represent Jordan at a March 7 road safety

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conference in Tunis organized by the Arab Federation on Road Safety.

**¶6.** (SBU) Comment: Jordan has almost 100% cell phone penetration although this usage is not evenly distributed. Some households have more than one cell phone per family member. A general propensity to talk on cell phones while driving, coupled with increasing numbers of vehicles on the road indicate the continued challenge of reducing accidents resulting from distracted driving. However, the presence of a legislative base, signs of some enforcement activity, including the novel friends of the police methodology and the private/public partnerships being practiced, contribute to an environment where USG collaboration could yield positive outcomes. End Comment.

BEECROFT